

SOUTH VIET NAM

Politico-Military Situation in 1968

**VIETNAM
COURIER**

Supplement No 201 January 27
1969

by CUU LONG (*)
(South Viet Nam)

- US imperialists' setbacks in strategy and tactics
- Causes and reasons for failure
- Why U.S. total defeat is inevitable

I

HOW U.S. STRATEGY AND TACTICS WERE FOILED

1968 will go down in the glorious history of the Vietnamese people as a year of grimmest fighting but also of most substantial successes, a year that has brought about a new turning point.

For U.S. imperialism, 1968 was one of the gloomiest years in the history of the aggression, marked by **three big strategic setbacks**:

— It was forced to end without conditions its bombing on the whole territory of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam;

— It had to fall back upon an all-round defensive strategy on the South Viet Nam battlefield; and

— To accept talks with the South Viet Nam NFL at the quadripartite conference in the French capital.

It is also in 1968 that the U.S. President had to bow out of the presidential race, the U.S. Secretary of Defence resigned and the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. forces in South Viet Nam was removed. These were clear indications of the bitter failure of the U.S. all taking place in the storm of the **general offensives and widespread uprisings** of the armed forces and people of South Viet Nam.

The actions started in late January and early February last year were, in essence, a wonderful strategic surprise attack launched by the South Vietnamese people and their

armed forces on all battlefields stretching over more than one thousand kilometres from Quang Tri in the North to Ca Mau in the South, especially in the towns, the foothold of vital importance to the enemy, including over forty cities, towns and provincial capitals. They caused a great sensation in the United States and had deep repercussions throughout the five continents. They made it possible for the South Vietnamese people's resistance to make a tremendous leap forward, upset and triggered off the sudden decline of the strategic position of the U.S.

STRATEGIC SETBACKS

NO sooner had it been put into effect than the "two-pronged" strategy ("search-and-destroy" and "pacification") had to be scrapped and the U.S. had to hurriedly switch to an all-round defensive strategy, a thing which it had not anticipated and for which it was ill-prepared. For strategy found its expression in Abram's so-called "hold-and-clear" and "defence in depth" plans. In taking this course, the enemy had the following goals in mind:

1. To avoid heavy casualties for the U.S. troops; and
2. To prevent the puppet army and administration's disintegration and collapse.

For nearly a year now, this U.S. all-round defensive strategy with the three above-mentioned aims,

* This article was released by Gai Phong Press Agency under the heading: "U.S. military strategy in South Viet Nam is an impasse". Sub-heads and emphases are ours — Ed.



A guerrilla unit of Cu Chi (Gia Dinh province)

however, has been dealt crippling blows and has proved a failure. Since the first days of the early Spring offensive and uprisings last year, virtually all the cities and towns; military bases, communication lines and the plains under enemy control have been attacked, and repeatedly so in some places. Recently the "accelerated pacification" programme has also been hard hit.

Though enemy has concentrated on the defence of the towns, in May 1968 over one hundred U.S. and puppet battalions were unable to prevent the PLAF and people from attacking and rising up in almost all the precincts of Saigon for a period of six weeks, wiping out big enemy units, shooting ablaze many tanks, shooting down many helicopters right in the streets and punishing many high-ranking agents of the U.S. In many places, the people succeeded in establishing their own control. Ever since, the

U.S. troops suffered so many casualties as in 1968. According to the 17th communique of the Command of the People's Liberation Armed Forces, U.S. and satellite losses in 1968 ran to 230,000 men, that is nearly as many as the sum total of the seven preceding years. All told in 8 years, the U.S. lost about half a million men. This is the approximate equivalent of the U.S. troop strength in South Viet Nam at its highest level, or one-sixth of the whole U.S. master-roll. The figure surpasses by far U.S. losses in World War I (320,000), in the Korean war (300,000) and amounts to nearly half of its World War II casualties (1,070,000).

The U.S. endeavoured to ward off the puppet army's further disintegration but never before had puppet troops' casualties been so high as in 1968 (400,000), and never before had there been so high a desertion rate (also in the area of 400,000). As a result, far from

conference in Paris, this administration has met with vehement protests from the entire South Vietnamese people including many in the upper strata and puppet army-men and administrative personnel, and has stirred up stronger anger from the world's peoples. Its doomsday is not far off.

FAILURE IN TACTICS

TO defeat the strategic objectives of the U.S. aggressors, the South Vietnamese people and their armed forces have cut-manoeuvred the main tactics in the enemy's "hold-and-clear" plan.

Because of the very low morale and poor combativeness of the U.S. infantry, and in an effort to avert heavier losses for the U.S. forces, the U.S. has relied heavily on aircraft and artillery, especially B-52 strategic bombers. Yet, it has been simply proved that neither aircraft, whether it is B-52s, jet fighter-bombers or armed helicopters, nor any kind of gun, can save the U.S. aggressors from ever bitter setbacks, as was evidenced by the big victories of the South Vietnamese people and their armed forces in Saigon, Da Nang, Hue, Khe Sanh, A Sae and Tay Ninh, where enemy fire-power was the biggest. On the other hand, the more aircraft and big guns the enemy put to use, the higher the records the South Vietnamese people and their armed forces in the destruction of these war means.

For defensive purposes, the U.S. has resorted to defence perimeters, erecting multi-layer defences around each city, each base, or each area, and, to forestall attacks, each of

these perimeters was made to include several fire support and operational bases and roads for transportation and troops mobility. In the countryside, small fortified complexes have been built; and for the protection of these and the adjacent communication lines, the enemy has used barbarous methods to clear the ground, and taken very strict security measures. Combining static tactics with mobile tactics, the enemy has launched consecutive police operations, relief operations, probes, "counter-preparation" operations, pre-emptive operations, etc., with the main emphasis on "armor tactics". But it is clear that these tactics, too, have failed. Series of fire support and operational bases have fallen, especially in Tay Ninh province while ambushes have never ceased endangering all roads and waterways.

In fact, erecting such defence perimeters is like trying to dam up a flood with a fence. In many places they have been broken by big chunks, in others they have been breached. Not a single town, not a single base of the enemy has been immune to attacks.

The enemy has also been thwarted in his other tactics and methods, such as the use of "pacification" teams, the "Eagle" espionage operation, the use of commandos, or "leap-frogging" operations to spy on and sabotage our corridors and bases, nibble at the liberated areas, and hinder the attacks and uprisings by the PLAF and the people.

The enemy has failed in all tactics of his defensive strategy. He has fallen short of every objective set for this strategy, and all the forces he has mustered in this strategy have sustained heavy losses. The so-called "hold-and-clear" plan of the U.S. is being swept down the drain, to Abrams' utter helplessness.



Students' manifestation in Saigon.

political and armed struggle in Saigon has never ceased growing. In certain battles, hundreds of enemy agents were wiped out in this biggest hair of the U.S.-puppets.

Da Nang, the second biggest city and a major military base of the U.S., could in no way be immune to onslaughts either, despite the presence of two U.S. divisions, one Pak Jung Hi brigade and 5 puppet regiments, and numerous barbed wire fences surrounding it on a radius of 30km. In August, the people and their armed forces launched tremendously successful large-scale attacks against the city. The political actions there also gained momentum. Added to the victories in Saigon and Da Nang, those at Khe Sanh in June and July, in Tay Ninh in August and September, in Ben Tre, etc were as many vivid illustrations of the unsoundness clear-and-hold plan of the U.S. aggressors.

The enemy tried to keep down U.S. tolls but never before had

increasing the troop strength of the puppet army, the enemy is now unable even to fill the gap left by casualties. Since the U.S. had to stop completely and unconditionally its bombardments in North Viet Nam, and accept talks with the NFL in Paris, the puppet army has been rent with new and violent upheavals. Plagued by defection and prompted by the desire for an end to the war, more and more anti-war actions and desertions have been occurring in the puppet army. Meanwhile the combat performance and operational and strategic effectiveness of the puppet army have dropped to an all-time low.

The U.S. aggressors have been striving to stave off the puppet administration's fall but never before has this administration been in so critical a predicament as it is now, both in terms of authority, organization and credit. Especially because of its bare attempts to prevent the unconditional cessation of the bombing of North Viet Nam by the U.S. and to block the quadripartite

THE ENEMY IS CAUGHT IN INSOLUBLE CONTRADICTIONS

ACUTE AND INSOLUBLE CONTRADICTIONS

The U.S. failure has become evident, and its "clear-and-hold" strategy has unquestionably gone bankrupt. This is because the U.S. is plagued by innumerable and unsurmountable difficulties and contradictions, like a patient affected by many incurable diseases at the same time.

1. Contradiction between the aggressive character of U.S. schemes and its nature and essence.

The war in South Viet Nam has the character of a bitter national and class struggle. It reflects the character and content of the great era we are living in — the era witnessing the offensive of the world revolution, setbacks and the inescapable

collapse of imperialism, whether under the guise of colonialism or neo-colonialism, and the inevitable victories of socialism and the national liberation movement, especially now that the socialist countries have become a powerful camp, a factor that decides the trend of development of the world's history and an immense source of support and inspiration to socialist and national liberation revolutions. It is precisely in such context that the U.S. started an atrocious war of aggression. Although aware of the bankruptcy of old-type colonialism, and forced to resort to neo-colonialism in a very crafty and obdurate manner, the U.S., however, has had finally to send an expeditionary army for furthering its aggressive schemes. There can be no better indication that the U.S. has engaged in an insolent tunnel and is heading for final defeat.



A sewing workshop in the South Viet Nam liberated zone

2. Contradiction between the objectives of the U.S. war of aggression and its defensive strategy.

The aim of a war of aggression is to destroy the forces, and grab the territory and resources, of the adversary. This, naturally, requires an offensive strategy. Yet, just as none of its objectives has been achieved and, what is more, just as it was sustaining very heavy losses in all fields, the U.S. has turned to an allround defensive strategy which, naturally, will not help it attain its goals, but will only prolong the war and increase its losses.

At one time, to make good its setbacks in South Viet Nam, the U.S. had to wage a war of destruction on North Viet Nam. But, after heavy reverses in both parts of our country, the U.S. had to stop the bombardments on the whole territory of North Viet Nam, which amounted to an acknowledgement of the failure of half of its war. The U.S. war of aggression as a whole having been delivered a crippling blow, and the other half of the war sustaining heavy setbacks, difficulties are now snow-balling. All this is the most unequivocal sign of U.S. failure.

This basic contradiction has generated a series of divergences in the U.S.-puppet command and leadership and drastically reduced the combat effectiveness and caused the morale of the U.S. and puppet army-men to sink beyond recovery at the very moment when the U.S. and puppets still have a numerous army.

3. Contradiction between the force, tactics, equipment and organization of the enemy's army on the one hand and its strategy on the other

Prepared and trained mainly for the offensive, the US forces are very handicapped by their cumbersome organization and equipment. Their cult being mobility, they are very weak when on the defensive. Now forced on to the defensive, US superiority in weaponry and technique

cannot be made full use of, which causes confusion to US command of the operations and execution of tactics. For instance, the US use tanks half-buried in bunkers to provide protection for a position, thus depriving the tanks of all the mobility and mobile ability, and greatly limiting their firepower. Another instance: troops of the "Air Mobile Cavalry Division", of the strategic reserve, have been pinned down in the defence of very scattered positions. How can it put into operation its "wonderful" mobility on which its architect, former U.S. Defence Secretary McNamara, once lavished no end of praise? The U.S. thus cannot make use of what it believes to be its strong points, instead it has to rely on what proves to be its weaknesses. Consequently, its strategy is in a deadlock, and its tactics in a mess.

4. Contradiction between the requirements in forces and their utilization.

U.S. troops are playing the role of workhorses of the war of aggression in South Viet Nam, although they are unequal to this role. But, because of the political, military, economic and financial difficulties at home and of the requirements of its global strategy, the US is contemplating "de-Americanizing" the war, switching the brunt of the war onto the decaying puppet army. The fix the U.S. is in is obvious.

In fact, in 1965, when the puppet army and administration proved unable to cope with the South Vietnamese people and their armed forces, the US had to commit en masse its own troops to a direct aggression. Its purpose was to employ both US troops and the puppet army as strategic forces.

With the involvement of US troops, the puppet army, however, put up even a poorer show, and ever since, has been relegated to the role of house-keeper, and assigned to "pacification". Now, with U.S. troops themselves facing the danger of

complete defeat, the U.S. tries to push the puppet army to the front-line in an attempt to save its own skin. It is just like using a drowning man to save a sinking boat.

5. Contradiction between the objectives of U.S. strategic politics and its military brutality.

For the realization of its neo-colonialist policy and to hoodwink the public in the world and "win the hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese people, the U.S. has posed as a "good friend" and to "respect the right to self-determination" of the South Vietnamese people. The puppets themselves are wearing a "democratic", "national", "legal", and "constitutional" face. But, under the impact of the stiff resistance of the South Viet Nam revolution, both the U.S. and the puppets have had to resort to very brutal methods, even towards the town people.

This is a longstanding contradiction which is now being all the more aggravated.

The U.S. is also torn by many other contradictions, between the necessity to consolidate and beef up the puppet army, and its actual capability of doing so, between heavy tanks and the very low ability and quality of U.S.-puppet troops who perform very poorly both on the offensive and on the defensive; between the need for a very big force and the very low ceiling of troop build-up; between the concentration and dispersion of forces; between the need to protect the towns, bases and communication lines, and the ambition to control the countryside, etc...

All these contradictions and difficulties are threatening the U.S. war of aggression with complete failure, and are seriously impairing the aggressive design of the ring-leaders of American warmongers.

U.S. IMPERIALISTS' OBSTINATE AND VAIN ATTEMPTS

BUT the U.S. aggressors are incurably stubborn. They still count on a fairly numerous army and a big amount of weapons and bombs to make desperate efforts to conceal their setbacks and difficulties, hide their confusion, and salvage what they can. They have not brought themselves to face the bitter fact that the longer the war lasts the heavier their setbacks.

At present, they are trying to carry out these sinister schemes:

1) Adjust the strategic deployment. They have just moved the 1st Air Mobile Cavalry Division south from Quang Tri-Thua Thien to defend at all costs the eastern part of Nam Bo and the Saigon-Gia Dinh area.

2) Knock together a group of henchmen and launch the so-called "accelerated pacification" plan aimed at seizing control of 1,000 hamlets and dislodging one million inhabitants from contested areas. Other agents are being assembled into "Phoenix" commando groups, whose job it is to assassinate patriots.

3) Try to "forestall Vietcong attacks" by most barbarous means such as cutting off roads, blocking waterways, closing frontiers, using B-52s and artillery, napalm and bulldozers, razing whole hamlets, burning whole jungles, and destroying ricefields in order to set up a no-man's-land around their strongholds, thus causing misery to so many people. In the towns, they order curfew, searches, arrests and wanton murders, suppressing all democratic liberties of the people.

4) Set to motion their "huge paywar machinery, make a noisy campaign about their "strength", "victories", "good will", and so on, to deceive the people, undermine the morale of our cadres



In a sanitary station (South Viet Nam liberated zone)

and fighters, now discord between our armed forces and people, and between our people and the National Front for Liberation.

But, again, they have miscalculated!

They want to hold the eastern part of Nam Bo and the Saigon-Gia Dinh area. But these areas with a long tradition and a long record of victorious resistance against U.S.-puppet troops, and a shining example in the general offensives and uprisings, are now stronger than ever. In the past 40 days, the people and their armed forces there have trounced the 1st Air Cav. putting out of action 2 battalions, 6 companies, and over 70 aircraft. They will surely foil all the new plots against their native land by the U.S.-puppets.

Together with Eastern Nam Bo and Saigon-Gia Dinh, our armed forces and people in all the other parts of South Viet Nam, including places from which the enemy have withdrawn, will dash forward fearlessly to win the biggest victories possible.

The enemy want to carry out his "accelerated pacification" programme. This is sheer foolishness, and a vicious circle! Have they forgotten that at one time they did attempt "pacification" on a massive scale only to suffer bitter failures, and blame one another for "impatience" and "perfunctoriness" then turn to "pacifying" key areas instead? They must also have forgotten that even the "pacification" of key areas has failed, and the "pacification" programme as a whole has been reduced to ashes in the flames of the general offensives and uprisings of our armed forces and people since early

last year. Now with a new mettle, our armed forces and people will certainly wipe out those who are trying to do the dirty job in which their predecessors have failed again and again. They will completely thwart the current "accelerated pacification" programme, wipe out the "Phoenix" commandos, and punish those who are attempting, with the shabby puppet flag, to usurp the revolutionary gains our armed forces and people have got at the cost of much blood.

The enemy want to stall off the attacks and uprisings of our armed forces and people. This is but an old scheme with old methods, old measures and old tactics, which all have come to a lamentable flop and will do so in a more pitiful way.

As to the enemy's pay-war, one wonders how the U.S. and puppets, who have failed so steadily and are now frightened out of their wits, can intimidate and deceive our armed forces and people who are the victor and are advancing to the biggest victories.

Of course, we shall never slacken vigilance before each concrete savage move of the enemy. Yet, in gauging the U.S.-puppets, we must grasp the full extent of their strategic setbacks and weaknesses. We must persist in our resolve and keep up the offensive, and, exploiting the basic sharpest contradictions in the strategy of the U.S. aggressors, we must attack them continually, and success is sure to belong to us. Meanwhile, in attacks, we must increase our watchfulness, resolutely foil all concrete plots and methods of the enemy, and overcome all difficulties and hardships, in order to achieve, step by step but promptly, complete victory.

III

TOTAL IMPASSE OF U.S. STRATEGY

THE impasse of U.S. military strategy in South Viet Nam is quite obvious. It is not only plain to the world at large,

but also publicly owned by the most stubborn White House rulers. This impasse can be summed up as follows:

1. The U.S. has deployed in its "limited war" here the largest numbers of troops and the biggest quantity of the most modern kinds of weapons it can afford, and at a higher level than planned by American strategists. The U.S. expeditionary corps is being used to such an extent that it has affected every aspect of the life in the U.S. Even so, the U.S. has achieved none of its strategic objectives, and has now to speak of withdrawal, troops rundown, etc. This is one of the clearest indications of the present plight of U.S. strategy.

2. The U.S. has used up all the imaginable political manoeuvres to conceal the aggressive, unjust character of its war, and to misrepresent the struggle of the South Vietnamese people. The claim that the U.S. is the "defender of freedom" has lost all its appeal. Even the ring-leaders of the U.S. aggressors cannot find anything to glamourise their "allies" while the puppets are telling in the face of their American "friends" that they are the aggressors and gangsters. While the U.S. keeps distorting the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese struggle, more flags of the NFL are seen flutter, right in the United States and other parts of the world. In fact, the U.S. cannot produce any other mask to hide its face and the faces of its puppets. In this respect, too, the U.S. has come to a deadlock.

3. The U.S. has also tried all its military methods, tactics and strategies. The "two-prong" strategic plan has been readjusted and renovated again and again, but still it is useless. As to the "pacification" programme, from a large scale, it has been scaled down to "key areas", and when this failed, "accelerated pacification" was resorted to. The time limit for this "accelerated pacification" was cut down, as a result of failure, to one or two months from eighteen or twelve months as first intended. Military operations, too, have completed a cycle: from small scale to large scale and now back to small scale. In many respects, the military plans and

methods of the U.S.-puppets have got involved in a vicious circle.

4. Financially, the U.S. has spent huge sums on this war — nearly one hundred billion dollars in four years, or the approximate equivalent of its annual budget — without achieving any of its goals. The violent impact of the war on the economy at home is urging the U.S. Government to cut war expenditures. That is also an imperative demand of the American people. Thus, rich as it is, the U.S. has reached the limit for its war expenditures in Viet Nam.

5. The cornerstone of the U.S. neo-colonialist scheme is to create a puppet regime capable of controlling and deceiving. Yet, the U.S. now has picked such third-class puppets as "president Nguyen Van Thieu", a one-time lieutenant of the puppet army under the French, and "vice-president" Nguyen Cao Ky — ex-flying officer under the French and a most unprincipled man. Even these chieftains of the puppets are calling one another "puppet". Army officers are battle-weary, and soldiers are fed up with the war. In this respect also, U.S. predicament is transparent, for even with five hundred thousand troops and millions of tons of bombs and shells it has failed in shoring up its puppets.

From the overall stalemate of U.S. military strategy, we can draw this conclusion: **the U.S. is bound to be defeated, the South Vietnamese people will certainly be the victor.** The U.S. has lost, is losing, and will lose more heavily.

Indeed, one more day of obduracy means one more day of failure for the U.S. Obdurate even in its impasse, the U.S. will only sustain heavier and more humiliating disasters.

A very great opportunity is open to all the patriotic armed forces and the entire people of South Viet Nam, and they are fired by a very great resolve: "So long as a single aggressor remains in our country, we must continue the struggle and wipe him away!" Holding high the banner of justice, they are determined to win complete victory.